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A Drone's Eye View of the Elwha River

Oct. 5, 2012 | KCTS9



A USGS researcher launches the video drone over Lake Mills near the Glines Canyon Dam. | credit: Provided by the U.S. Geological Survey | rollover image for more

Scientists have been looking at all angles of the Elwha River since deconstruction began on two dams just over a year ago. They've been testing turbidity, tracking river otters and conducting an ongoing salmon census.

And now they're using remote-control planes to record high-definition video and thermal images. They're securing a small camera to a 4-foot wide drone, which can fly as high as 500 feet over the river.

Last week researchers with the U.S. Geological Survey stood on the banks of Lake Mills, which was formed by the 210-foot Glines Canyon dam, and launched the camera-toting drone called a Raven. It flew for about 30 minutes over the exposed reservoir showing the vast fields of sediment that have built up behind the dam over the last 85 years.

Watch this video to see highlights from the drone's most recent flight:



By studying every inch of the Elwha, scientists hope to answer big questions about dam removal: What happens to the fish? What happens to the massive reserves of sediment? And what happens to the barren, unvegetated areas of the emptied reservoirs?

The drone video research of the Elwha is a collaboration between the U.S. Geological Survey, the Bureau of Reclamation and the National Park Service.

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